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ABSTRACT

This document presents a collection of brief articles about children which were written in West Germany and compiled for the International Year of the Child. Topics covered include: (1) the importance of children's early years, (2) child abuse, (3) family planning, (4) the need for playgrounds, (5) the German Children's Protection Federation, (6) examples of small scale children's programs --- children's hot line, a children's house, and a toy rental program, (7) improvements in children's television, (8) foreign children, and (9) attitudes behind the declining birth rate. (JMB)

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Survey

THE ADULTS OF TOMORROW

1979 - Year of the child

by

Martina I. Kischke

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I. "You learn only from those you love"

- The early years are decisive -

Bonn (INP) - The magazine for parents, "Eltern" (parents), asked Swedish writer Astrid Lindgren - famous for her children's books - to write an article on the International Year of the Child.

In her article, the authoress, who won the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in Frankfurt in 1978, recalled what was once written by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: "One learns only from those one loves". She went on: "A child which is treated lovingly by its parents and loves its parents gains a loving relationship with its environment as a result and maintains this basic attitude throughout life. This is good even if the child does not later become one of the individuals who guide the destiny of the world. But if, against all expectations, the child were to become one of those powerful individuals, it would be in everyone's interests if its basic attitude were influenced by love and not by force. The statesmen and politicians of the future have their characters shaped before reaching the age of five years, just like anyone else."

The Federal Ministry for Youth, Family and Health in Bonn, which has a special duty to children, launched a newspaper advertisement campaign, asking West Germans such questions as: "How often do you go a whole night without sleep because of screaming children?" The text goes on: "How often are you a nervous wreck because everything, but everything must revolve around the children? Perhaps your attitude is 'Well, I'll just have to cope with it all' or 'Crying is good for their lungs'. Many parents give their children tranquillisers, use earplugs themselves or just put the child in another room 'for the sake of peace and quiet'. Later, many parents are surprised to find that their children are quiet or aggressive, wet their beds, bite their fingernails or suddenly have tantrums."

Small children need more than food and dry "nappies". There is scientific evidence that the first three years of life decide whether a child becomes a cheerful or introvert, weak or stable individual. A child which enjoys love and security, is frequently wrapped in its mother's arms and played with, is quick to make contact with other children and is not left alone becomes mentally awake and

open-minded in later life."

Like the experts from the ministry, the Swedish authoress attempted to make two points clear to readers: first the great importance of the initial years of life, as elucidated by scientists and second the supreme pedagogical commandment: a child needs tenderness and attention.

(IN-Press)

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II. Parents have to learn how to be parents

- Parents can be a danger to children -

Hamburg/Munich (INP) - Official appeals to parents to give their children more love are not without reason. Lack of knowledge about educational matters causes many mothers and fathers to have insufficient understanding for their children. They have not learned themselves how to be parents. Disintegration of the traditional family structure in which Grandmother advised and helped Mother, has left many young women in a state of uncertainty and stress in their dealings with their own offspring. Kurt Nitsch, president of the German Federation for the Protection of Children, says that two-thirds of all parents in the Federal Republic of Germany are simply not up to their educational responsibilities.

These shortcomings play a major part in one of the saddest aspects of this modern society, something known in Anglo-Saxon countries as "child-bashing"; criminal records show that the known number of cases of mistreatment of children in the Federal Republic of Germany is about 1,800 per year. In reality, there may be many more which never come to light. The weekly magazine STERN reported recently: "The Children's Hospital in Lann-Giessen has established that about 600 children die as a result of beatings every year - considerably more than fatalities caused by the classical children's ailments measles, hooping cough, diphtheria, scarlet fever and chicken pox."

Hamburg has drawn its own conclusions; in June 1977, the country's first municipal registry of child maltreatment was set up in the city. Acting on information provided by the general public, this bureau provides fast and unbureaucratic help. The system was explained to us by the head social worker, Sigrid Horn: "We help the parents. We attempt to get to the root of the problem. These mothers and fathers simply can't solve their own problems. We are frequently amazed at the grateful way in which our offers of help are accepted. Often, parents are relieved just to be able to talk about their problems. Now and again, we can obtain a bigger apartment or even a new job for parents." So far, the new registry has never had to prosecute. The offer of educational assistance or even therapeutic treatment is much more effective because it means the parents can keep their child at home.

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The so-called "youth departments" in the various federal states also provide assistance and advice in the education sector. Some state governments send "first-time mothers" so-called "Elternbriefe" (parents' newsletters) dealing with educational questions, nutrition and health hints. In Munich, local authorities advise parents how to protect their children against accidents, reporting recently that about 25 children suffocate every year in this country when playing with plastic carrier-bags. Often, parents never even think about some of the risks facing young children. The Munich campaign is backed by the federal and state governments as well as regional authorities and confines its work to prevention of accidents in the domestic sector.

The Munich organisation's periodical magazine commented: "Important provisos for successful accident prevention are knowledge, skill and will - qualities not pre-programmed by the biological organism but acquired through learning. Because the phase of greatest learning power and will to learn occurs during early childhood and lays the basis for basic attitudes in later life, the process of learning about safety must begin within the family. Educational institutions such as kindergarten and schools should continue these learning processes."

The campaign committee has good reasons for its continual appeals for parents to teach children safety awareness. In road accidents in the Federal Republic of Germany in 1977, 70,000 children below the age of 14 years were injured, 1,353 of them fatally. Some 35% of the annual approx. 1,800,000 West Germans injured in and around the home are in the same age group. The most endangered age group are the under-nine-year-olds. If parents can learn to eliminate risk factors - such as keeping pan-handles out of children's reach when cooking or installing special safety electrical sockets - a lot will be achieved.

(IN-Press)

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III. A child's right to be wanted

- Family planning follows sex education -

Bonn (INP) - Parents who love their children also protect them. Wanted children are loved children. With this in mind, the Bonn Families Ministry published a brochure one year ago under the title "Every child has a right to be wanted". This publication deals with family planning and lists advice bureaus, the best-known of which is the non-partisan, supra-confessional "Pro Familia" organisation sponsored by federal states and district authorities and actively supported by a large number of doctors.

Sigrid Horn, a leading Hamburg social worker, in an interview with the weekly magazine STERN, pointed out the connection between undesired children and the problem of maltreatment of children: "When infants are maltreated, it's often a case of delayed abortion. Unwanted children are being punished."

The national committee for the preparation and implementation of the International Year of the Child in the Federal Republic of Germany summarised: "Planned parenthood is in the interests of the child." It's programme contains the following demands as means of preventing the birth of unplanned, unwanted and unloved children:

- more inter-disciplinary research into the motives of family planning and the causes of the decline in the birth-rate;
- inclusion in scholastic and non-scholastic educational curriculae of family planning as a special aspect of sex education;
- more concentration on apprentices, trainees and young female and male workers in sexual advisory services;
- inclusion of sex education questions in adult education to assist parents in teaching their children about sexual matters and to augment sex education in schools. Because the idea of wanted children depends on joint family planning by both partners, more attention should be devoted to males in adult education programmes of sex education."

(IN-Press)

IV. What the children want

- Children know what they need -

Bonn (INP) - The International Year of the Child has inspired a great deal of talk about making the environment more "friendly" to children, about taking steps to provide more help for children. There's less talk, however, about what the children themselves want in the Federal Republic of Germany. And this in spite of the fact that tomorrow's adults know quite well what they want. Woman journalist Carola Benninghoven listed children's expectations in the Year of the Child. Wish No. One: "Adults shouldn't complain so much." An 11-year-old girl added that adults should remember there was a time when they, too "weren't exactly little angels."

The wishes expressed by children are both astonishingly simple and frighteningly recriminatory. Twelve-year-old Frank, for example, would like children to receive "equal treatment" at department store and shop cash desks, that adults shouldn't always be given preferential treatment. The youngsters would like adults to have more time for them. And they want "adventure playgrounds" which are guarded night and day "so that adults don't wreck them".

Almost all big-city children want more playgrounds; furthermore, they say that existing playgrounds on housing estates are spoiled by rules and regulations because people living around them complain so much about noise.

So it's not surprising that the national committee for the Year of the Child devotes a whole chapter to just this point. The article is headlined "In favour of an environment more friendly to children". The committee pays tribute to the efforts of communal authorities in recent years to provide more play areas but also draws attention to the shortcomings which often spoil everything. "While the legal regulations of the federal states, the special playground regulations of some states and federal legislation have eased the lack of playgrounds, there is still a serious lack of amenities and proper playground planning due to lack of knowledge of the function of play areas for both children and adolescents. In most cases, they are designed to the specifications of adults, not children. This is why children often don't accept them. The amenities in most play-

grounds are frequently schematic and unimaginative."

And it often happens that these so unimaginative playgrounds are wrecked by rowdies; sandboxes are used as "lavatories" by dogs. For this reason, the committee demands, in its programme, that playgrounds supervised by trained pedagogues be created. "The federal and state governments should take account of the demands for a better environment for children when they make their financial allocations to communal authorities."

Children pass through various stages of development. A small infant needs a different playground from that of an eleven-year-old. All children need variety and stimulus at play. So, apart from adventure playgrounds, there's also a need for small kiddies' playgrounds, perhaps also with toy buses placed in parks or market squares and supervised by trained personnel.

(IN-Press)

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V. The children's "lobby"

- German Children's Protection Federation 25 years old -

Stuttgart (INP) - A great deal must still be done for children, and this can be seen not only from the major programme launched by the national committee for the Year of the Child. However, quite a lot is already being done for the 10 million or so children under 14 years of age now living in the Federal Republic of Germany. There are some 800,000 single persons with almost 1,300,000 children under 18, officially referred to as "one-parent families". The German Children's Protection Federation, which celebrated the 25th anniversary of its founding in 1978, sees itself as the "children's lobby". The federation, in its own words, works for "equal rights for children in our society". It wants "the liberation of children from pressures dictated by the adult drive for achievement and which deprive children of the freedom of movement they need to develop and become independent."

The federation is one of the 80 organisations which have joined forces in the national committee for the preparation and implementation of the International Year of the Child in this country. The Federal Government has allotted the committee 472,000 DM to finance its activities in 1979. Apart from its published programme and a large variety of other planned activities, such as the introduction of school buildings fitted more to children's tastes, the committee plans to use the money to build a model playground at the Federal Garden Show in Bonn this year.

To mark the International Year of the Child, the Social Democratic Party in Baden-Württemberg has launched a citizens' action campaign with the motto "Our children - our responsibility". The aim is to make the public more aware of children's problems. Campaign proposals and speeches have been put together in a book using the motto as its title. An article by former Development Aid Minister Erhard Eppler points out: "The world in which our children will grow up because we have failed to make it a better one makes it difficult to be young, often causes more suffering and certainly is more dangerous and endangered than in the past." The SPD politician concludes: "We owe it to our children that we don't run away, that

we don't just let them run around without love, that we don't strike a pseudo-authoritarian pose which would ultimately deprive us of all integrity. We owe it to our children that we accept them as they have become, not without our influence. They need us. Let's make sure that we can be of use to them."

(IN-Press)

VI. It's little things that count

- Small effort, big results -

Kiel (INP) - It's not necessarily big campaigns that are needed to help children. Sometimes all that's needed is a little helping hand in daily life. Little campaigns that help to make the world a better place for children. Here are three examples:

1) "Worry telephone" in Mönchengladbach

The idea came from the German Children's Protection Federation, and it was put into practice by a 36-year-old housewife in Mönchengladbach. A mother of two children, aged seven and nine, she knows the trouble children sometimes have in relations with their parents. They are often afraid their parents won't understand. How does one "break the news" to parents when school report cards paint a black picture? How does one ask a mother who only wants "peace and quiet" when one wants to bring a couple of school friends home? Fully understanding such problems, Margot Haken set up a "worries telephone" in November 1978. Every Monday afternoon, children can call her up and tell their worries. The callers can remain anonymous, but Margot is also willing to approach the parents of callers seeking help and advice. Margot has discovered there's a great need for advice and comfort. "Monday afternoon is just not enough any more." After all, people with worries don't look at the calendar or the clock.

2) The "children's house" at Itzehoe

Another idea which came from the German Children's Protection Federation. In 1971, volunteers at Itzehoe in northern Germany launched a series of campaigns for children at the premises of the Protestant Church. They included homework help for the children of foreign workers, children's play-hours for youngsters with working parents and a variety of other activities. The idea was so successful that a special building was constructed in 1976, and this is now known as the "children's house of Itzehoe". An all-day kindergarten was installed in the former infectious diseases barracks of a hospital. The "children's house" has about 15 rooms, with a volunteer assistant in each. All rooms are open to all children. They can come and go as they wish, either participating in hobbies or simply "cuddling" the women on duty when they feel the need for affection. A notice

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board reminds the youngsters: "Do whatever you like - only don't disturb anyone at work or play."
Magdalena Schröder, local chairwoman of the federation who runs the house, believes contact with parents is very important. Mothers and fathers frequently drop in in the afternoon to watch their children at play or learning while they play. What the kiddies are, in fact, learning is a catalogue of social values which they'll always need throughout life, including willingness to help others and harmony. Sometimes, parents seek advice from the volunteers in educational matters. It costs 100 DM a month to instal a child in the scheme. Parents who can't afford this always find help.

3) The "play-o-theque" in Quickborn

A mother, annoyed that her children had received too many toys as Christmas presents from relatives and had lost interest in their old playthings, got the idea of the "play-o-theque" - a play-place equipped with toys for hire. Children came swarming, fascinated by the idea of borrowing someone else's toys. There was also room to play, and many of the kiddies didn't have this at home. The "play-o-theque" at Quickborn is now a permanent facility subsidised by the state government. Similar centres have been set up elsewhere and the state of Schleswig-Holstein, in which Quickborn lies, has even provided a mobile play room which is taken to outlying villages for the children's pleasure.

None of these three examples is on a grand scale. But they do demonstrate that a lot can be done for children with a little imagination and willingness to give up some free time.

(IN-Press)

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VII. Campaigns for children

- Television is doing its bit -

Remscheid (INP) - Experience has always shown that it's only when suggestions come from outside that things begin to happen and people begin to get new ideas. The International Year of the Child, which coincides with the 20th anniversary of the "Declaration of the rights of children", has inspired activities which only a few people thought possible just a year or two ago. Suddenly, adults realize that children can be partners - provided they are given the chance.

A project group calling itself "Weeks of Children's Culture" was set up in Remscheid under the aegis of the"Federation of Juvenile Cultural Education Organisations". This group collated and processed recommendations and suggestions for organising special cultural events for children. These included proposals as to how to make a children's newspaper or to organise children's theatre or music concerts. The resultant detailed programme can be requested and obtained by any organisation or group within the federation.

The programme brochure for the central children's cultural event is a precise guide to planners. It explains how to obtain accommodation, to draw the public's attention to it and to achieve big results without spending much money. Two elements are of special importance to planners: first the inclusion of foreign children in joint ventures and,second,information facilities for adults on the periphery of children's cultural events. Parents are being encouraged to make a habit of organising events for children on a regular basis, not only during Year of the Child.

In a society such as that of the Federal Republic of Germany, in which television plays such a major role, television stations are being asked to make more of the Year of the Child in their programmes. The second main national network ZDF is planning a "Day of the Child on 6th March 1979, when the entire programme will be reserved to this topic. Additional programmes on the same theme will be screened throughout the year, covering such questions as guardianship, juvenile crime or the children of foreign workers.

(IN-Press)

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VIII. Strangers or friends?

- Foreign children are part of the community -

Bonn (INP) - "Strangers or friends? It's up to us. Let us go to them." This is the subtitle of a brochure entitled "Foreign children", published by "Aktion Gemeinsinn" (operation community spirit). About one million children of foreign workers currently live in the Federal Republic of Germany. There can be no denying that relations between them and their German fellow citizens are often marred by misunderstandings and prejudices. Aktion Gemeinsinn hopes to dispel these misunderstandings and prejudices. Its members want to scrap such "loaded" terms as "maccaroni gulpers" or the no less stupid label "potato eaters". The organisation, set up on private initiative, non-partisan and embracing both main churches, puts it like this: "Every schoolchild, every mother, every student, in fact every private citizen with a little time on hand can do something for foreign children. The condition is that they must earn the love of the children and the trust of their parents. Almost all private initiatives on behalf of foreign children have been launched by the same few people."

There is a broad range of ways in which help can be given. In Munich, for example, a citizens' committee helps foreign children with their home lessons. Some 200 volunteers help about 600 children in this case. In Stuttgart, a young girls' club looks after unemployed foreign girls, showing them how to operate sewing machines or how to shop economically. In Berlin, the German Youth Sports organisation arranges a German-Turkish children's rendezvous in which the youngsters cook, bake and take part in joint hobby activities. Aktion Gemeinsinn has launched a 1979 campaign which will draw the public's attention to the problems confronting foreign children in this country.

(IN-Press)

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IX. Are West Germans tired of children?

- Wish for children often a pretence -

Bonn (INP) - The International Year of the Child has brought a flood of appeals and campaigns upon the people of the Federal Republic of Germany. But how badly do they really want their own children? Gloomily, politicians and sociologists proclaim that Germans are "tired" of children. Indeed, the figures speak for themselves in a rather alarming way. For instance, the number of children registering for school will be down by half in 1980 compared to 1970. The birth-rate surplus reached its all-time record in 1965, but since 1972, there have consistently been more deaths than births in this country every year. Statistics for 1977 show there were 582,348 births and 704,922 deaths. A German journalist noted: "Some 20% of the couples who married in 1971 will still be childless 20 years later according to calculations based on trends to date; 31% will have only one child and less than 15% three or more children. This is a trend which, quite aside from statistics, will deeply influence society. For many parents, a second child is already a burden. Third and fourth children are regarded as almost unbearable burdens on family and working life."

Many Germans blame the "anti-baby" pill for this dark view of things to come. But the experts don't swallow this argument. In 1970, only 20% of West German women used this form of contraceptive; five years later, their number had not exceeded 30%.

It is more probable that the desire for a large family is thwarted by the environmental obstacles to happy childhood - the drive for achievement at school, hostile high-rise architecture, the problems facing mothers seeking part-time work, the "unrealism" of municipal life, etc. No-one can dispute that these problems must be tackled by scientists and politicians, and this not only in International Year of the Child.

The President of the Deutscher Bundestag (Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament in Bonn), Karl Carstens, dealt with the problem in his 1979 New Year's speech; "We must change our attitudes to children

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and to large families and see children for what they really are - a blessing, not only for parents but for our entire nation."

Politicians have, in fact, taken one step in the direction of creating a society more fit for children to live in: as from 1st July, 1979, women in this country will be entitled to paid holidays for six months after they bear children.

(IN-Press)

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